

Asheville City Council
Planning and Economic Development Committee

2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m., October 10, 2007
Economic Development Office Conference Room

Minutes

Present: Councilman Jan Davis, Chair; Vice Mayor Holly Jones; Staff members: Sam Powers, Stephanie Monson, Alan Glines, Shannon Tuch, Nikki Gunter; David Hanks, City Manager Gary Jackson

Guests: Leeza Brandon, Civil War Trails program

The Planning and Economic Development Committee met on October 10, 2007 at 29 Haywood Street at 2:00 p.m. Chair Jan Davis called the meeting to order.

1. Approval of Minutes

Tabled until end of meeting; motion by Vice Mayor Jones to approve minutes, second by Chair Davis. Motion passed.

2. New Business

None.

3. Presentations

NC Division of Cultural Heritage Civil War Trails Program

Leeza Brandon, of the NC Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development, attended to present the program.

The Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development is funding the NC Civil War Trails project through a \$1.1 million federal Transportation Enhancements grant. The monies are being used to develop, design, fabricate and install historical markers to interpret campaign sites and corridors of the Civil War. This is part of a multi-state program. Partners for the project include the NC Department of Transportation and the NC Department of Cultural Resources.

Each marker will cost \$5500 but communities will pay \$1100 per sign matched by \$4400 provided through the grant. The Division expects to install around 200 markers throughout the State using these funds. They are hoping for approximately 30 markers across the County.

DOT pays for \$4400; Buncombe County Tourism Product Development Fund will cover the additional \$1100. However, there is a \$200 per marker yearly maintenance fee. Ms. Brandon requested consideration of funding of the yearly maintenance fee for 15 markers in Buncombe County, which are on City property. Vice Mayor Jones expressed concern over setting a precedent for ongoing allocations. Discussion by staff and committee members included

concern over leaving “holes” if fees not approved and alternative funding secured. City Manager Jackson asked if an application to the TDA had been submitted to pay this fee. Ms. Brandon indicated that they had, but the TDA had turned them down.

The decision was made to invite a representative of the TDA to the next meeting to discuss partnering with them on the Civil War Trails program.

4. Updates and Status Reports

Infill and Affordable Housing Issues

David Hanks, Water Resources Director, presented an update (attached) for possible uses of water funds as incentives for infill and affordable housing.

City Manager Gary Jackson will have further discussions with Bob Oast, Legal, and will keep the Committee updated.

Merrimon Avenue Zoning Process

Shannon Tuch, Interim Director of Planning, began the discussion by acknowledging that the Planning Department has taken a “step back” to try to understand what happened related to the Merrimon Avenue rezoning process, how it happened and why, as to not have the misunderstandings happen again. The question is how to garner business and individual input so as to satisfy everyone more equitably. The process may have become fragmented, but there is not formal process to follow.

Planning staff have put together the framework to garner input. The following are avenues for seeking input: mailers will be sent (with comparison charts), a webpage will be created, with interactive questions/answers, there will be a cable channel piece and also a press release. The question is how to address non-conformities, and grandfather in properties.

Chairman Davis suggested not going too heavy on television piece. It is important to realize that there are a small number of property owners that own a large amount of Merrimon Avenue, and are fiercely protective of their financial interests. He also suggested keeping the process short, and very plain.

An issue of major concern for these property owners is the perception of zero set-backs; one layer parking is possible. They also need to recognize that their property is grandfathered into existing zoning regulations.

Another misconception is the issue of construction costs of 50% of the value of the tax value. Folks believe that if they spend 50% of the tax value, that they will have to bring the entire building into compliance, which is not the case. This only applies if you do a rebuild.

Chairman Davis also suggested that a good approach, other than keeping it simple, would be to gather several of the major property owners together to get their buy-in up front. If everyone comes together at one time, not everyone can listen, understand and move on.

Vice Mayor Holly Jones questioned the opportunity of building a partnership with the owners, and looking long-term at installing underground utilities. Staff has looked into the cost associated with underground utilities and found that it is estimated at over \$9 million. Mark Combs is working on a presentation.

Master Plan RFQ

Sam Powers, Director of Economic Development, informed the Committee that the Downtown Master Plan RFQ has been released. It has been advertised through the NCAPA, the APA, The Urban Land Institute magazine and on the website. It is due on November 8th at 4:00p.

City-Owned Property RFQ

Mr. Powers also informed the Committee on the status of the City-owned property RFQ. City Council will be presented with a short-list of pre-qualified developers at their October 16th meeting. Individual site meetings will then be hosted for the interested pre-qualified developers on November 8th.